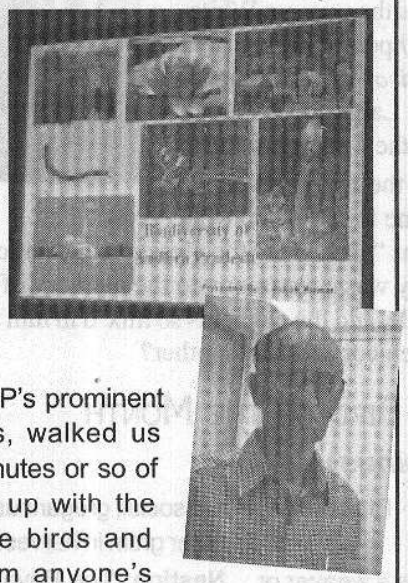
Report – Indoor meeting

By Ravi Mundoli

What connects a Japanese musical instrument and an Indian Railways bogie? How can you tell a deer from an antelope? What happens when you pick up a Jerdon's Courser? These intriguing questions (and many, many others) were answered at Mr Ashok Kumar's talk on *The Biodiversity of Andhra Pradesh*, held on 16 November, at the Association of German Culture.



Mr Ashok Kumar, one of BSAP's prominent and longstanding members, walked us through an engrossing 90 minutes or so of slides and factoids, spiced up with the occasional anecdote. While birds and birding were never far from anyone's thoughts, what made the presentation really interesting was the holistic and associative approach to wilderness and wildlife.

We saw a biodiversity map of the state, with the locations of all the important sanctuaries and national parks prominently marked, and got a birds' eye view of the different kinds of fauna that inhabit these beautiful places. We learnt of the three types of forests to be found in Andhra Pradesh, the different kinds of vegetation that one runs into in these forests, and the unfortunate rate at which they are dwindling.

The grand tour of the arboretum was followed by a close look at the four-legged denizens of the jungle. Ungulates, bovines, felines, ursines, lupines, and vulpines were all considered and pondered over. Cosines seem to be the only *–ines* that escaped our notice!

The creepy-crawlies were not left behind, as we ventured along the forest floor, watching a krait from a respectful distance here; rooting out a tarantula there; and gasping at the myriad colours of a host of butterflies.

Mr Ashok Kumar also helped dispel a few erroneous notions that we had about the nature and behaviour of some creatures, and left us with a few thoughts on how we as ordinary citizens and nature lovers can contribute to preserving and promoting the incredible biological richness that we happen to live in the midst of.

Remembering Salim Ali

By Anita Pillay

Salim Ali, who was born 12 November 1896 and died on 27 July 1987 at the relatively 'young' age of 91, till the end remained an ever-curious person with a passion for birds. Indeed with Shakespeare we can marvel at the 'special providence in the fall of a sparrow' – the incident that led young Salim Ali to become a birder – because ornithology in India is alive and hopping about in various hues and sizes, largely due to his efforts.

BSAP celebrated his birthday on 12 November in an appropriate way: by joining a 'Wagtail walk' organised by the Centre for Environmental Education at Sanjeeviah Park, Hyderabad. 6.30 am, of what turned out to be a very pleasant morning, saw us entering the park with our binoculars at the ready. Almost immediately we spotted a Pied Starling *(Sturnus contra)*, a local resident which had met us on previous visits. We strolled along the edge of the Hussain Sagar, one of the largest man-made lakes in Asia, some 444 years old. The fact that it is exactly four times as old as Salim Ali who would have been 111 if he had been with us today, seemed somehow appropriate.

At once we encountered the Common Coot *(Fulica atra)* and a large number of Black-winged Stilts *(Himantopus himantopus)* flying around dangling their reddish legs. We saw Little Grebe *(Tachybaptus ruficollis)* bobbing like corks under the bridge yonder and in contrast an Indian Pond Heron *(Ardeola grayii)* sulking on a rock and a Little Cormorant *(Phalacrocorax niger)* drying spread-out wings in its typical heraldic pose. As we walked a Grey-headed Starling *(Sturnus malabaricus)* was found perched on a tree, and we also sighted a variety of colourful birds: Small Green Bee-Eaters *(Merops orientalis)*, Golden Orioles *(Oriolus kundoo)*, Greater Coucal *(Centropus sinensis)* and Common Myna *(Acridotheres*